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Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern, Schweiz
info@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com

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ASSANDRI, Friederike: *Beyond the Daode jing*: *Twofold Mystery in Tang Daoism*. Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2009. 244 + 66 pp. index, ISBN 978-1-9314-8312-4.

Heir to the exegetical traditions of the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Classic of the Way and its Virtue), the Twofold Mystery (Chongxuan 重玄) teaching of the Tang (618–907) is an avowedly Daoist school of thought. However, the scope of both its heritage and legacy extend "beyond the *Daode jing*" as Friederike Assandri convincingly shows in this first and very thorough book length study devoted to Twofold Mystery in a Western language. The author authoritatively draws the portrait of a hybrid teaching, paragon of the rich Buddho-Daoist interplay of medieval China and the product of an intricate philosophical and religious to and fro. Twofold Mystery is all the more remarkable as it is set against the backdrop of fierce court debates and competition for state support, a climate in which the integration and institutionalization of previously splintered traditions was a political necessity. Contrary to expectation, it is this very fragmented and composite nature that permitted Twofold Mystery thinkers to supply a common, conciliatory intellectual and soteriological bedrock for unifying diverse practices, beliefs, and pantheons under the banner of Daoism.

The first chapter of the book, "Historical Background: Schools and Politics" (7–26) sheds light on details that contextualized the emergence of Twofold Mystery, providing a succinct and wonderfully lucid account of how a panoply of loosely federated Buddhist intellectual trends and local Daoist traditions were increasingly pushed towards institutional unification by social and political forces – mirroring perhaps the late Six Dynasties impulse toward the restoration of a unified empire. This chapter is crucial in establishing the intellectual roots of Twofold Mystery in a variety of schools such as Mystery Learning (Xuanxue 玄學) and Madhyāmika Buddhist philosophy, while situating its emergence in a highly politicized climate of tradition building.

Assandri then introduces us to "Major Representatives: Daoists of the Liang and Tang" (27–48), who wheeled and dealed to ensure that Twofold Mystery, and Daoism more generally, were ensured a prominent place at the capital, and this amidst a pronounced Buddhist presence. Twofold Mystery thinkers are depicted as being much more complex figures than the historiographical cleavage between reclusive philosophers and opportunistic religious specialists suggests. Actively engaged in exegesis, the compilation of encyclopedias, and court debates, Twofold Mystery thinkers were just as instrumental in

representing Daoist interests at the higher echelons of power and culture as they were to the articulation of a Daoist identity. Sun Deng 孫登 (4th c.), Meng Zhizhou 孟知周 (6th c.), Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631) and Li Rong 李榮 (7th c.) are some of the figures exhaustively covered in the chapter.

As with its defining figures, representative Twofold Mystery sources are not part of a recognized or self-conscious lineage. This renders the task of identifying them all the more treacherous. Nonetheless, in "The Sources: Commentaries and Scriptures" (49–84), the author establishes cohesion in a seemingly disjointed corpus. In devising her catalogue, Assandri is astutely mindful of the tradition's philosophical and religious dimensions along with the Buddhist elements apparent in both. The result is an eclectic but cogent index of sources encompassing Daoist canonical sources and Dunhuang manuscripts. The list begins with commentaries to the *Daode jing* and the *Benji jing* 本際經 (Scripture of the Original Beginning), a rich text riddled with Buddhist concepts and parallels that is one of the earliest to reflect mature Twofold Mystery thought. Follows the *Huming jing* 護命經 (Scripture of Saving Life), a short text that was seemingly written as a complement and equivalent to the *Heart Sūtra*, and various sections of the *Daojiao yishu* 道教義樞 (Pivotal Meaning of the Daoist Doctrine) and the *Xuanmen dayi* 玄門大義 (Principal Meaning of the Mystery Teaching). No doubt in an effort to ride the coattails of their successful competetors, these two encyclopedias were renown for integrating an impressive amount of Buddhist notions into Daoist ontological and epistemological discourses. Two final representative Twofold Mystery scriptures from the seventh century are listed: the long and rather doctrinal *Haikong jing* 海空經 (Scripture of Sea-like Emptiness) and the shorter *Xuanzhu lu* 玄珠錄 (Record of the Mysterious Pearl), belonging to the "recorded sayings" genre. The chapter ends with a helpful discussion of the intended audience for each of the sources mentioned, where the bifocal emphasis on philosophy and religion becomes apparent once more.

Assandri then turns to the "Key Concepts: Twofold Mystery, Dao, and the Greater Cosmos" (85–109). The concept of *chongxuan* originally derived from the first chapter of the *Daode jing* ("*xuan zhi you xuan* 玄之又玄"), and so it follows that its understanding in Twofold Mystery was based on early exegetical traditions that developed around the text such as those of the Wang Bi 王弼, Heshang gong 河上公 and Xianger 想爾 commentaries. Succinctly put, the "two mysteries" represent two levels, conceptual and mystical, of understanding the Way. Wang Bi first glossed the term *xuan* as *wu* 無, or "emptiness," opening the door to discussions of being and non-being. Kumārajīva's (ca. 344–ca. 409) commentary to the *Daode jing*, now lost, was the first to apply the

Mādhyamika *tetralemma* (*siju* 四句) to the text. Its four postulates, each successive one negating the previous (all dharmas are being [*you* 有]/ all dharmas are non-being [*wu* 無]/ all dharmas are being and non-being [*yi you yi wu* 亦有亦無]/ all dharmas are neither being nor non-being [*fei you fei wu* 非有非無]), in combination with the Madhyāmika dialectic of the two truths, wordly (*shidi* 世諦) and absolute (*zhendi* 真諦), formed the conceptual backbone of the school of thought. On this basis, Twofold Mystery thinkers beginning with Cheng Xuanying argued that the distinction between being and non-being should be overcome, and that, furthermore, the distinction between distinguishing being from non-being and not distinguishing between them at all should also be transcended. This logic was notably employed to counter many of the accusations of "worldliness" that were leveled at Daoists in court debates and in polemical sources such as Jizang's 吉藏 (549–623) *Sanlun xuanyi* 三論玄義 (Mysterious Meaning of the Three Śāstras). Through the same dialectical process, the Dao was considered ultimate non-being and the source of all being, all at once, simultaneously embodying absolute vacuity and actively working to save all beings. For proponents of Twofold mystery, this apparent paradox was resolved with the help of a cosmogonic theory that progresses from original unity to differentiation.

"Salvation: Dao Nature and the Sage" (110–130) continues the examination of key Twofold Mystery concepts initiated in the previous chapter, this time focusing on the theme of soteriology. Immortality, which overcomes the dichotomy between being and non-being, life and death, is the carrot at the end of the Twofold Mystery stick. It is attainable by all for it lies dormant in all, as Dao-nature (*daoxing* 道性) – a notion strongly evocative of but appreciably different from its Buddhist counterpart. By tapping into this connection to the macrocosm, each individual can reverse the cosmogonic process and revert from differentiation to original unity. However, despite its egalitarian premise, salvation is only achievable through the compassion and proper guidance of the sage (*sheng* 聖), a central component of the school's soteriology, who also embodied a political ideal in courtly discussions of Twofold Mystery thought.

"The Teaching: Mysticism, Cultivation, and Integration" (131–151) addresses certain epistemological issues pertaining to the relationship between the absolute Dao and its mediated version, a teaching that can be grasped by human language and cognition. The *tetralemma* is particularly solicited in this effort, leading to the conclusion that any teaching is only a provisory steppingstone. Surprisingly, rather than degenerating into nihilism, this stance managed to integrate a large number of disparate traditions and perspectives under the um-

brella of Daoism. Self-cultivation is a preferred road to the Dao precisely for the reason that its practice is non-intellectual and thus, in principle, independent from language and cognition. Through elaborate contemplation and visualization practices, Twofold Mystery self-cultivation reverses the cosmogonic process and grants, in the long run, *physical* (and thus verifiable) immortality to the adept. However, continued reliance on any self-cultivation practice must itself be severed to realize ultimate understanding of the Dao. Beyond its soteriological functions, mysticism, by virtue of its insistence on non-differentiation, also serves the purpose of integrating all Daoist teachings.

Beyond an integration of Daoist traditions, Twofold Mystery also had a hand in attempts at integrating Buddhism and Daoism. "Changes in the Pantheon: Laozi and the Heavenly Deities" (152–172) documents how the pantheons presented in sources such as the *Shengxuan jing* 昇玄經 (Scripture of Ascending to Mystery) reflect official streamlining efforts during the late Six Dynasties. The more convincing *Benji jing* supplies a full narrative framework to justify the amalgamation of Buddhist deities or notions – although they are never identified as such – with Daoist ones. The text is of particular interest since it situates mature Twofold Mystery thought with respect to other Daoist traditions via a reorganization of the pantheon: the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊) is the highest revealing deity, who then entrusts transmission to the Highest Lord of the Dao (Taishang daojun 太上道君), who in turn, assigns transmission duties to various subordinate gods or Perfected (*zhenren* 真人) of the Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清), Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寶), or the expressly demoted Heavenly Master (Tianshidao 天師道) traditions. In both instances, these sources mirror the vicissitudes of imperial sponsorship and the fickle nature of political allegiance in the capital city of Chang'an.

Elaborating on the theme of the previous chapter, "The Body of the Sage: The Three-in-One and the Threefold Body of the Buddha" (173–191), looks at how the Heavenly Worthy, Lord Lao (Laojun 老君), or other deities were integrated by means of a reinterpretation of the notion of the Three Ones (*sanyi* 三一). This concept helped to reconcile abstract notions of a singular ultimate with its anthropomorphized and comparatively concrete manifestations, a theoretical quandary that had plagued early Daoists and Buddhists alike. On the basis of the later tradition's theory of the three bodies of the Buddha (*sanshen* 三身), Twofold Mystery thinkers devised the notion of the two bodies of the sage (the Response Body, *yingshen* 應身 and Truth Body, *zhenshen* 真身). Ultimate principle and personified deity, wisdom and compassion, philosophy and

religion, Twofold Mystery thought embodied the collapse of binary distinctions and the reconciliation of even the most disparate of traditions.

In her "Conclusion" (192–197), Assandri reframes the findings of the previous chapters by underlining the formative role of Buddho-Daoist interchange in the development of Twofold Mystery thought. In this she joins a select group of Western scholars, such as Christine Mollier, James Robson, and more recently Catherine Despeux, who adopt an integrated approach to the study of Chinese religions.[1] By considering both Buddhism and Daoism as indissociable and equally ingredient to medieval Chinese intellectual and religious innovation, *Beyond the Daode jing* has insufflated new life in old avenues of inquiry probed almost a generation ago by Erik Zürcher or Franciscus Verellen for instance, and most iconoclastically, by Michel Strickmann.[2]

Rendering the tired trope of "influence" obsolete, Assandri paints a canvas of vivacious intellectual exchange among the two traditions, one defined by dialogue as well as appropriation and reformulation. All the while, she is careful to underscore that the relations between Buddhism and Daoism were very often tense. The world of court debates was indeed unforgiving. Yet it is this very spirit of competition that forced both traditions into sustained contact with each other, resulting in the cross-fertilization of ideas and the formation of richly eclectic yet integrated Buddhisms and Daoisms. A case in point, Twofold Mystery thought, the author argues, may have been born out of an effort to

1 See Christine Mollier: *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008, and her "Iconizing the Daoist-Buddhist Relationship: Cliff Sculptures in Sichuan during the Reign of Tang Xuanzong." *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 2 (2010): 95–133; James Robson: *The Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak* (Nanyue 南嶽) *in Medieval China*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009; and Catherine Despeux: *Médecine, religion et société dans la Chine médiévale. Étude de manuscrits chinois de Dunhuang et de Turfan* (3 vols.). Paris: Collège de France / Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2010.

2 Zürcher and Verellen's approaches are more characteristic of the "influence" paradigm, but the materials and issues they deal with nonetheless betray a more complex relationship between Daoism and Buddhism; see, for example, Erik Zürcher: "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence." *T'oung Pao* 66.1-3 (1980): 84–148; and Franciscus Verellen: "'Evidential Miracles in Support of Taoism.' The Inversion of a Buddhist Apologetic Tradition in Late Tang China." *T'oung Pao* 78 (1992): 217–263. Michel Strickmann's approach is comparatively more contemporary; see his *Mantras et mandarins. Le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996; and his *Chinese Magical Medicine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

respond to Buddhist accusations that Daoists were an inchoate and dispersed group of sects that worshiped a panoply of unrelated gods. Eager to establish their credibility vis-à-vis Buddhists and the court, Daoists federated by, audaciously, relying on Buddhist logic and equating their various deities with Lord Lao, the sacred ancestor of the Tang founders.

Four invaluable appendices are provided: 1) a chronology of "Buddhist Madhyāmika Teachers" (199–200); 2) a translation of Cheng Xuanying's "Commentary to the *Daode jing*" (201–208); 3) a translation of chapter 5 of the *Benji jing* (209–216), the only one where Laozi (Laojun) appears; and 4) an integral translation of the *Huming jing* (216–218). Regrettably, there is no glossary. The bibliography is divided into primary (219–227) and secondary (228–244) sources. It is followed by a short but useful index (245–250).

Refreshingly, Assandri's book reflects cutting edge scholarship in the field of Daoist studies and more broadly, that of Chinese religions or Chinese intellectual history. It is precisely because of this position at the vanguard of her field that one may meet her decision to pick her battles with surprise. Assandri ultimately shies away from addressing issues that could prospectively widen the impact of her work even more: the first footnote of the book (p. 1) timidly sketches the contours of the debate about how to qualify certain elements of Chinese thought, including Twofold Mystery – are they philosophies, religions, or "teachings" (a placatory term the author eventually settles on throughout the book)? This circumscribed question has broader and very significant implications for the validity of modern disciplinary boundaries and their relative methodologies. Because of their important ramifications, these are issues that, if broached, deserve fuller elaboration. Some readers may have appreciated the author tackle the problem rather than being referred to the opinions, no less valid, of other scholars.[3] Potentially, *Beyond the Daode jing* could have presented as a forceful argument for increased reflexivity and the redrawing disciplinary boundaries in the study of Buddhism and Daoism. The recent works

3 For the question of defining the Twofold Mystery school in particular, see Robert Sharf: *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism. A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, pp. 56–60. For the application of categories such as "religion" and "philosophy" to Chinese phenomena, Assandri directs the reader to Joseph Adler's paper on "Confucianism as Religion/Religious Tradition/Neither: Still Hazy After All These Years," and Russell Kirkland's lecture on "The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China: De-Colonizing the Exotic Teaching of the East," among others.

of Carine Defoort and Joachim Kurtz have achieved just that in the field of Chinese philosophy.[4] With respect to religious studies, Timothy Fitzgerald, Richard King, Tomoko Masuzawa, and Russell T. McCutcheon are among the scholars who have successfully called into question the legitimacy of eurocentric post-enlightenment modes of analysis based on historically contingent categories including "philosophy" and "religion," "rational" and "mystical," "science" and "superstition" and the essentialist dialectic that governs them.[5] Given that Assandri is reliant on, but also palpably suspicious of many of these terms, it would have benefited both author and audience to air some of the dirty methodological laundry.

Beyond positioning herself as a trailblazer in the field of Buddho-Daoism, Assandri also counterweighs the Buddhist bias symptomatic of much of the publications pertaining to Six Dynasties and Tang court debates. In doing so, she fills a sizeable gap in medieval Chinese religious and intellectual history, revealing that both Buddhism and Daoism were defined and shaped by their interactions with each other. Elegantly written and lucidly argued, *Beyond the Daode jing* is sure to open new and fruitful avenues of inquiry in the study of Chinese religions and thought.

Dominic Steavu

4 Catherine Defoort: "*Is* There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy? Arguments of an Implicit Debate." *Philosophy East and West*, 51.3 (2001): 393–413; and Joachim Kurtz: *The Discovery of Chinese Logic*, Leiden: Brill, 2011; in a similar vein, see also, Sally Humphreys: "De-modernizing the Classics?" In: Angelos Chaniotis, Annika Kuhn, and Christina Kuhn (eds.): *Applied Classics: Comparisons, Constructs, Controversies*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2009, pp. 197–206.

5 Timothy Fitzgerald: *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the 'Mystic East.'* London: Routledge, 1999; Tomoko Masuzawa: *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; and Russell T. McCutcheon: *Manufacturing Religion The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; for more general considerations, see Talal Asad: *Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, Modernity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.